

Air Mail

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Yellowstone Park, Wyo.

Dear Mom & Dad,

This is a strange and fascinating place, full of surprises, full of "Oh's" and "Ah's" - awe-inspiring in its sublime beauty and its never-ending activity. There's action everywhere you look! You'll probably remember from your history that John Colter, a member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, was the first white man to visit this region. When he returned to civilization, people just wouldn't believe his stories about the colored hot pools, strange springs, boiling mud, great multi-hued terraces, hissing steam vents - and particularly the geysers. There just wasn't any such place! Surely, the poor man's mind was deranged from his years of suffering and hardship! So, the term, "Colter's Hell" was born. Now, I can better appreciate why one must see for himself! Today, I came across a poem, written many years ago by a man who must have been a skeptic - until he came out here. I thought you might like it, so here goes



YELLOWSTONE PARK.... AND HOW IT WAS NAMED

The Devil was sitting in Hades one day,
In a very disconsolate sort of a way.
One could tell from his vigorous switching of tail,
His scratching his horn with the point of his nail,
That something had gone with His Majesty wrong.
The steam was so thick and the Sulphur so strong.
He rose from his throne with a gleam in his eye,
And beckoning an agate-eyed imp standing by,
Commanded forthwith to be sent to him there
Old Charon, employed in collecting the fare
Of the wicked who crossed the waters of Styx,
And found themselves soon in a deuce of a fix.

Old Charon, thus summoned, came soon to his chief,
As the Devil was angry, the confab was brief.
Said the Devil to Charon, "Now, what shall I do?
The world, it grows worse and grows wicked, too;
What with Portland, Chicago, San Francisco, New York,
I get in my mortals too fast for my fork;
I haven't the room in these caverns below,
St. Peter, above, is rejecting them so.
So hire you, my Charon, to earth, far away,
Fly over the globe without any delay,
And find me a spot quite secluded and drear,
Where I can drill holes from the center in here.
I must blast out more space, so survey the spot well,
For the project on hand is the enlargement of Hell."



"But recollect one thing, Old Charon, when you
Can locate the district where I can bore through,
There must be conveniences scattered around
To carry on business when I'm above ground.
An 'ink-pot' must always be ready at hand
To write out the names of the parties I strand.
There must be a 'punch bowl', a 'frying-pan', too,
A 'cauldron' in which to concoct a 'ragout'.
An 'old faithful' sentinel showing my power
Must shoot a salute on the earth every hour.
And should any mortal by accident view
The spot you have chosen, why, then you must do:
Develop a series of pools, green and blue,
That while these poor earth bugs may beauties admire
They'll forget that below I'm poking the fire.
Now fly away, Charon, be quick as you can,
For my place here's so full that I can't roast a man."

To earth flew fleet Charon, to regions of ice;
He found there too cold - so away in a trice
He sought a location in Africa's sands,
He prospected, and finding too much on his hands
He cut out Australia, Siberia, too,
The north part of China - no! they would not do;
Till just as about to relinquish the chase
He stumbled upon a most singular place.
'Twas deep in the midst of a mountainous range,
Surrounded by valleys secluded and strange,
In a country the greatest, the grandest, the best
To be found upon earth - America's West.
Here the crust seemed quite thin and the purified air,
With the chemicals hidden around everywhere,
Would soon make the lakes that the Devil desired;
So he flew to Chicago and there to him wired:
"I've found you a place never looked at before;
You may heat up the rocks, turn on water, and bore."



Then the Devil with mortals kept plying the fire,
Extracting the water around from the mire,
And boring great holes with a terrible dust,
Till soon quite a number appeared near the crust.
Then he turned on the steam - and lo! upward did fly,
Through rents in the surface, the rocks to the sky.
Then with a rumble there came from each spot,
Huge volumes of water remarkably hot,
That had been there in caverns since knifer fell -
Thus immensely enlarging the confines of Hell,
And it happens that now when Old Charon brings in
A remarkable load of original sin,
That His Majesty quietly takes up the coals,
And up spouts the water, in jets, through the holes.
One may tell by the number of spurts when they come,
How many poor mortals the Devil takes home.

But Yankees can sometimes, without doing evil,
Outmatch in sagacity even the Devil.
For not long ago Uncle Sam came that way
And said to himself, "Here's the Devil to pay.
Successful I've been in all previous wars,
Now Satan shall bow to the Stars and the Stars.
This property's mine, and I hold it in fee;
And all of this earth shall its majesty see.
The deer and the elk unmolested shall roam,
The bear and the buffalo each have a home.
The eagle shall spring from her eyrie and soar
O'er crags in the canyons where cataracts roar;
The wild fowls shall circle the pools in their flight,
The geysers shall flash in the moonbeams at night.
Now I christen the country - let all nations hark!
I name it the Yellowstone National Park."



... William Ted Helmueth

... Hope you liked it! I did - but now this letter has become rather L-O-N-G, so will call it a day. More about my travels later on.

The Traveler

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